

4 Key Dimensions of Self-Care

What is self-care and why does it matter? Self-care includes all the things you do to take care of your well-being in four key dimensions – your emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual health.

If you are a counsellor, social worker, therapist, health care professional, leader, educator, change agent, caregiver, parent, purpose-driven entrepreneur – a person who gives a lot of yourself in service to the well-being, learning, and growth of others in some way – self-care and care of others becomes an important balancing act.

Self-care is essential for managing stress, preventing burnout, and mitigating compassion fatigue – all common occupational hazards for caring individuals. Self-care is also important for a sense of overall integrity, as it ensures we are “walking our talk.”

One of my social work professors often said, “We only take other people as far as we have gone ourselves.” We can only give to others what we are in some way giving and receiving for ourselves. If we are working to support others to grow, how are we growing? If we are working with others to learn, how are we learning?

Helpers, healers, and leaders are often focused on the results they are achieving with and for others. Self-care involves focusing on yourself and taking time to rest, reflect, replenish, and renew. Self-care includes taking stock of your own needs, goals, health, and accomplishments; taking time to nourish and nurture *all* of who you are.

Imagine your self-care in four key dimensions of well-being: mind (mental/psychological), body (physical), heart (emotional), and spirit (spiritual/essence). You might picture yourself walking around a circle that has four quadrants⁴ and stopping in each one to reflect on it.

Physical (the body) – to live, move, and breath

Physical self-care involves ensuring an overall healthy lifestyle that includes eating healthy, drinking lots of water, and getting plenty of exercise. Consider decluttering your home and office so that you have a feeling of spaciousness and manageability. Take time away from computers, TV, and your smartphone (sedentary lifestyles are a health issue). Enjoy moments to rest and replenish.

PAUSE & REFLECT: WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY DOING FOR YOUR PHYSICAL SELF-CARE?

Emotional (heart) – to love, care, and be in relationship with yourself and others

Emotional self-care might include setting clear boundaries on your time and energy. Engage emotional boundaries within helping relationships, surrounding yourself with positive people and affirmative and inspiring messages. Address any issues or problems so that they don't build up. Give and receive love, kindness, and support. Spend time with people you care about and who care about you.

PAUSE & REFLECT: WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY DOING FOR YOUR EMOTIONAL SELF-CARE?

Psychological (the mind) – to learn, think, and grow

Psychological self-care activities might include personal and professional development. Give attention to things that are in your control (your sphere of influence). Take time for personal reflection. Notice your inner experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Cultivate self-awareness through things such as journaling, getting feedback from others, meditation, coaching/counselling, and consultation or supervision – places where you have the opportunity to grow, learn, and reflect.

PAUSE & REFLECT: WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY DOING FOR YOUR PSYCHOLOGICAL SELF-CARE?

Spiritual (the spirit) – to connect with essence, purpose, and meaning

Spiritual self-care might include prayer or meditation. You may want to visualize, practice gratitude, spend time in nature, and be aware of the non-material aspects of your life. Identify what is meaningful to you in your work and life. Practice mindfulness and being present in the moment.

PAUSE & REFLECT: WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY DOING FOR YOUR SPIRITUAL SELF-CARE?

Reflective Journaling Exercise

With these four dimensions of self-care and wellness in mind, consider your own self-care activities in these areas of life. How do you nourish your mind, body, heart, and spirit? How do you actively reduce and manage stress in both your personal and professional life?

How do you feel when you are honoring your self-care needs? How do you recognize when you are neglecting your self-care needs? What's calling to you for more attention? What self-care are you feeling proud of? What is one self-care action you would like to commit to doing today? This week? This month?

Your self-care matters! Allow it to be fun, guilt-free, enjoyable, and nourishing. You know what is best for you – give yourself permission to take time to fill your own cup so that you can make a difference from a place of vitality, well-being, and health. Your self-care benefits you and others too – it is a win-win!

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Author: [Lynda Monk](#) (MSW, RSW)
Trainer, Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute